



Arriving at A Marketing Plan: Moving from Thinking to Doing

By Susan Henken, Highland Team

Most people make plans for special events like a weekend away, a party or a vacation. Why, then, are many business people so uncomfortable planning for their products' marketing? How do you get beyond thinking of a plan as a four-letter word?

Writing a strategic marketing plan is critical because it provides your company with a guide to growing profits. It is very important that you do not see your marketing plan as just an academic exercise. Look at it as your plan for profitability, a guide for your employees, and your payback for work well done.

Don't worry about the formalities of planning. You won't need special software or a "killer" format. Use the back for a napkin or a paper bag if you must—just start putting your marketing plan in writing. What you learn about your company and put in writing during the planning process is the most valuable part of creating the document—plus capturing all those ideas floating in your head and putting them on paper will help you organize your thinking.

To illustrate the contents of a marketing plan, the chart below compares the typical segments of a marketing plan with the activities necessary to organize a vacation. Everyone likes taking a vacation, and planning them is often part of the fun...the travel shows, brochures, and books, thinking of what you'd like to do and the way you'd like to get there and what you'd like to do when you

are there. A marketing plan offers your company the same opportunity-where do you want to go, how will you get there, what do you need to do to reach your destination. The example should move you past “planning phobia” and get you started enjoying the profits that come from a well designed and executed marketing plan.

Marketing Plan	Vacation Plan
A. Background Information	Diving Trip to Barrier Reef
Strengths (what are the specific strengths of your company)	Beautiful beaches, water and diving
Weaknesses (What are the weaknesses in your company-organization, market, environment, people, products)	It is a long way to go It’s relatively expensive My spouse doesn’t like diving as much as I do
Threats (Are there competitive or environmental threats that can disrupt your company)	The flight could be cancelled Sharks Jellyfish
Opportunities (Are there opportunities in your company-new audiences, new products, changes in the market)	New places, new faces, new foods, new sports
Market Segments	People who like exotic places
Target Markets	My Spouse
B. Marketing Goals	Trip Goals
Increase revenues by 10%	I want to go to the Barrier Reef with my spouse for a relaxing time for a price within my budget
Increase market share 7%	
C. Strategies (How will you get to where you want to be)	Strategies (How will you get to where you want to be)

Product: Development plans, packaging, brand names, line additions	Product: What town, what resort?
Pricing: Value, Cost-Plus, Competitive, discount, payment schedules and terms	Pricing: What price range? Use cash or credit card?
Distribution Channels: Direct, sales force, online, distributors, value-added resellers, catalogs, etc	Getting There: Which airline, which route, what schedule?
Promotion: Communications Objectives, target, message, media (TV, magazine, radio, online), events	Convincing: What message will generate excitement? In what way-email, card, face-to-face?
D. Tactical Action Plans (What needs to be done, time lines, staffing, budgets)	Tactical Action Plans (Things To Do List)
Product: Design, package, brand/logo design, warranty, customer service/satisfaction process	Product: Reservations, pack clothes, confirm reservations again, arrange activities
Pricing: Schedule, payment terms, discounts	Pricing: Get travelers checks, check credit limit, get cash
Distribution: Incentives, materials, sales tools, prospect lists	Getting There: Reservations for airline, re-confirm airline, arrange taxi to/from airports
Promotion: Type, quantity, time line, PR, trade shows list, direct mail production, online production	Convincing: Leave literature around house, get travel documentary, check weather website

Susan Henken is Principal of Highland Team, a go-to-market consulting firm, which creates revenue-enhancing strategies and programs to launch and grow businesses. Highland Team specializes in strategic marketing, channel strategy development and go-to-market planning and implementation with clear ROI results. Susan has twenty years of consumer, health care and small business marketing experience in executive and senior management marketing positions.

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